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SUBJECT: Finnish Press Reaction to Recent Soviet Pronouncements.						

Publication of the Bulganin letter to Norwegian Prime Minister Gerhardsen and the Izvestia article of March 26 on "revival of Finnish militarism" resulted in considerable comment in the Finnish press in the succeeding week. Editorials on the letter to Oslo, and the subsequent one to Danish Prime Minister Hansen, were generally factual and--while admitting the seriousness of the situation--calm in the manner of a people accustomed to alternating warmth and bluster from the Soviets. The Soviet letter might have passed with little special notice had it not coincided with appearance of the Izvestia article, provoking speculation, sometimes involving reference to the Swedish-Soviet exchanges on Raoul Wallenberg and espionage, that a new and tougher Soviet policy toward the North might be in the making.

The Finnish press generally characterized the Izvestia article as untrue, exaggerated or based on misunderstanding. Some newspapers professed innocence in terms verging on sarcasm, and almost all took occasion to renew pledges of Finnish friendship for the Soviet Union--and all other countries. Combined with the larger problem of Soviet-Scandinavian (and sometimes Soviet-free world) relations, the strictly Finnish question gave rise to an unusual, but probably healthy, degree of frank discussion of Finnish-Soviet relations in which all shades of political opinion were heard from except, unaccountably, the Social Democratic press.

BULGANIN LETTERS

The consensus of Finnish press comment on the Bulganin letters has been that they demonstrate the general increase in tension in the world since the Hungarian uprising and, specifically, the seriousness of the situation in northern Europe. Most prominent among the reasons adduced to explain Soviet concern was the prospect of American willingness to share atomic weapons and guided missiles with European NATO countries. Agreement on common markets* and other unifying measures and unrest in Estonia were also mentioned. Independent-Liberal "Helsingin Sanomat" (Finland's largest paper) went further on March 30 to attribute the apparent renewal of Soviet interest in

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Europe to the demonstration of Anglo-American unity at Bermuda and the cessation of "talk of the weakness of NATO". Admitting various causes of Soviet irritation, HS concluded by speculating whether the new Soviet toughness was anything more serious than a diplomatic maneuver to gain Soviet ends where other tactics had failed.

"Ilta-Sanomat", the afternoon edition of HS, also published and closely supervised by pre-war Foreign Minister Eljas Erkkö, came nearest to actually condemning Soviet behavior when on March 28 it cited recent Soviet actions which it said had neither helped to restore the good will destroyed in the Hungarian affair nor served to promote the friendly relations which were the aim of the Finnish invitation to Bulganin and Khrushchev to visit Finland next June. I-S wondered "what has happened in the Kremlin" since the invitation was extended early in February. In a subtler, tongue-in-cheek vein, Conservative "Uusi Suomi" attributed the Bulganin letters merely to "Russian realism" striving to make the North (in the words of the Soviet hosts during the February visit of Prime Minister Fagerholm to Moscow) "a peaceful corner of the world".

"Maakansa", principal organ of the Agrarian Party, wrote on March 28 of the letter to Gerhardsen (without reference to the Izvestia article) as a "serious warning" which had aroused "interest, but also a certain anxiety". This authoritative paper presumed that the Soviets wished to provoke public discussion of defense policy in Norway, but, in agreement with several others, it concluded that the Soviet effort would not lead to any changes. Like "Maakansa", Agrarian "Savon Sanomat" in Kuopio called attention to Bulganin's reference to the implications of the existence of NATO bases for Norway's neighbors--"a matter . . . requiring more careful appraisal than the situation has heretofore been considered to demand". In the only Communist comment thus far noted, SKDL "Kansan Uutiset" on March 29 deplored interpretations which regarded the letter to Gerhardsen as a "veiled threat". Denying inconsistency between the letter and the Izvestia article, KU said that they merely showed that tension had increased in the North.

IZVESTIA ARTICLE

The initial and dominant reaction of the press to the article by N. Dedkov claiming a revival of Finnish militarism, was to deny the accuracy of the writer's inferences which were based on Finland's efforts at improving national and civil defense and honors conferred on veterans of the 1939-44 wars. Almost all papers asserted that Finland's foreign policy was unchanged.

Those papers that chose to regard the article as the work of an individual used adjectives like "preposterous" and "absurd" (Swedish-language "Hufvudstadsbladet" and "Vasabladet"). The organ of the

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displaced Karelians, "Karjala" carried this to the point of calling for Dedkov's summary recall, just as a Finnish correspondent in Moscow would be recalled if he wrote such an erroneous story about the Soviet Union. The Finns would take the Dedkov article calmly, said "Karjala", but would the Soviets do the same? Such an article could be comprehended, it concluded, only if it were considered that tension had increased in northern Europe. Conservative "Satakunnan Kansa" of Pori appeared to give the Soviets credit for good intentions when it attributed Dedkov's errors to Izvestia's practice of taking its facts from Finland's yellow [i.e., Communist] journals.

Editorial comment in which it was assumed, explicitly or otherwise, that anything appearing in Izvestia must represent official Soviet views, could not fail to point out the inconsistency of the article with Bulganin's praise of Fenno-Soviet relations in the letter to Gerhardsen. Some papers went further to cite Soviet statements as recently as during the Fagerholm visit to Moscow concerning the danger of war at any moment, reasoning (as did "Uusi Suomi", for example on March 28) that the Finns could only view matters with similar realism by preparing their defenses, both in their own interests and in keeping with their obligations under the 1948 Mutual Assistance Pact with the Soviets. Referring to the forthcoming B & K visit as evidence of the success of Finland's policy of friendship with all countries, "Uusi Suomi" on March 31 played back old Soviet cliches such as, "The Finnish people innocently trust that the visit will improve mutual confidence and peaceful coexistence between two neighboring countries of differing political and social systems."

Besides sharing the attitudes cited above, Agrarian "Ilkka" in Vaasa on March 30 asserted with some show of boldness that in the Peace Treaty Finland did not give up its right to self defense, the celebration of patriotic occasions or the paying of homage to war veterans. Its counterpart in Kuopio, stated that it is a Finnish right and, under the 1948 treaty, a duty to preserve a spirit of national defense, as well as civil defense; disclaiming knowledge of any militaristic movement in Finland, "Savon Sanomat" continued that if it does exist it is negligible and if ideas dangerous to Finland should appear, the Finns will condemn them.

A distinctly different line was taken by other Agrarian organs. "Pohjolan Sanomat" in Kemi on March 29 denied that the Izvestia article could be considered an "attack" on Finland or that it was related in any way to the letter to Gerhardsen. As did "Maakansa" later, the Kemi paper admitted almost apologetically that there had been some ill-considered statements, but both said that they were of no importance.**

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Failure of "Maakansa" to comment on the Izvestia article until April 2, and the continued silence of "Sosialidemokraatti" (the other major government party organ), may lend special weight to the Agrarian organ's ultimate statement that the firmness of Finland's position was demonstrated by the praise of Fenno-Soviet relations contained in the letter to Gerhardsen and the plans for the Soviet visit beginning June 6. Both "Maakansa" and "Pohjolan Sanomat" have fairly close connections with Party headquarters and President Kekkonen. If, as the latter paper asserted, there was no intentional relationship between the Bulganin letters and the Izvestia article, it might be deduced that the apparently unexpected agreement on the dates of the Soviet visit (as announced in the press on March 31) could have been contrived as a Soviet effort to repair some of the damage done in Finland by the coincidence of the letters and the article.

For the Ambassador:

Grant G. Hilliker

Grant G. Hilliker
Second Secretary of Embassy

* The "Ryömä line" given full play by the Communist-front SKDL in the previous week's Diet debate on economic stabilization was that the Cabinet's economic plans were only a step toward changing Finnish foreign policies through association with the European common market, which represented a campaign against Communism. This was given little notice by the non-Communist press, except for a "Helsingin Sanomat" editorial on March 23 that presumed that Mauri Ryömä had brought this message back from Moscow during his recent visit there. If so, the paper said, foreign policy has changed somewhere, but not in Finland.

** In this they were consistent with previous Agrarian partisan tactics of criticizing real or imagined extremists of the Right both within and outside of their own party, in an effort to earn internal and foreign recognition as a "Center" party while shedding pre-war character as a preponderantly bourgeois group. The "Kyntäjä" article from which Izvestia quoted was a product of this effort rather than primarily an indication of concern over resurgent militarism.

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